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David Searby – Statement to Inquiry into Bristol Airport Expansion

My name is David Searby. In my professional life I manage a team of 18 people and control a revenue budget in excess of £750,000 per annum.

I would like to address the economic aspects of Bristol airports expansion proposals. Bristol airports claims about the economic benefits can be found on their website. (1)

They claim that the expansion will “connect businesses to new markets”

In fact the vast majority of the flights from the airport are for outbound tourism. According to the CAA, only 15% of departures from UK airports in 2019 were for business. (2)

They claim that the expansion will “enable tourists to visit the region”

In fact, of the 75% of flights from the UK for international leisure trips, the majority (62%) are UK residents taking holidays abroad, meaning that far more UK residents fly out for holidays than foreign residents fly in. UK travellers flying abroad and international travellers flying into the UK spend about the same amount – around £700 per person. But as more UK residents fly out than international tourists fly in, the UK operates a significant travel spending deficit. Indeed, about £30bn moves out of the economy every year due to international travel. This problem is getting worse: after inflation, this deficit doubled between 2012 and 2019, driven almost exclusively by increasing numbers of passengers flying out of the UK. (3)

They claim that expansion will generate 1000 new jobs

In fact, the ‘job intensity’ of aviation (ie, the number of jobs per passenger) has been falling consistently for more than a decade. A recent report by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) on crisis support to aviation (4) showed that airport sector jobs have never recovered to their peak in 2007, despite huge growth in passenger numbers. We already have plenty of evidence that this trend will continue, as airlines exploit this economic crisis as an opportunity to squeeze working conditions and pursue further ‘efficiencies’.

I am sure other speakers will outline the grave impacts of airport expansion due to climate change, noise and increased car traffic. I believe that the evidence above shows that Bristol Airport’s claim that these are justified by economic benefits does not stand up to scrutiny.

References:

- 1) <https://www.bristolairport.co.uk/about-us/who-we-are/our-future/planning-application-faqs>
- 2) <https://www.caa.co.uk/Data-and-analysis/UK-aviation-market/Consumer-research/Departing-passenger-survey/2019-Passenger-survey-report/>
- 3) <https://neweconomics.org/2020/09/the-dodgy-economics-behind-expanding-our-airports>.
- 4) <https://neweconomics.org/2020/06/crisis-support-to-aviation-and-the-right-to-retrain>